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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000821

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SEVENTH FLEET FOR VADM GREENERT

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TAGS: OVIP PREL PGOV MARR TH

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF SEVENTH FLEET COMMANDER

VADM GREENERT

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

11. (C) Jonathan, all of us in Bangkok look forward to your return visit and the big top reception aboard the USS Blue Ridge. Our military-to-military relationship is strong. Nonetheless, our relationship with the Royal Thai Navy could be improved. We hope during your stay that you will be able to promote several issues such as our desire for better cooperation with Thailand in maritime security as well as flag key benefits of U.S.-Thai cooperation such as the growing professionalism within Thai Naval Special Forces.

THE OVERALL SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

12. (C) The U.S.-Thai security relationship is based on over 50 years of close cooperation. Thai soldiers, sailors and airmen participated in the Korean and Vietnamese Conflicts and Thai peacekeepers served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thailand is the fourth largest participant in the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Thailand's willingness to allow the United States to use Utapao Naval Air Station as the hub for our regional tsunami assistance program was key to making Operation Unified Assistance a success. In your meetings with Thai officials, you will want to note the overall strength of the relationship -- highlighting our history and underscoring the importance of our tsunami cooperation, exercise program, increased tempo of USN ship visits, and cooperation in the War on Terrorism.

THE NAVAL RELATIONSHIP

13. (C) While our overall relationship with the Thai military is good, our links with the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) are not as strong as those with the Royal Thai Army or Air Force. The RTN is smaller than the other services and tends to be less willing to be open with U.S. counterparts. This has not been the case historically, and we need to work to reverse the trend. Recently, the Chinese have improved their ties to the RTN as evidenced by the first PLA Navy ship visit to Phuket, a joint SAR exercise in the Andaman Sea, and sales to Thailand of Chinese equipment. Likewise, the RTN has been developing a closer relationship with the Indian Navy and has conducted some exercises with the Indians.

14. (C) In addition to supporting our annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise with Thailand, JUSMAGTHAI has worked closely with RTN Special Warfare units to increase their capacity. USN SEALS have helped to provide their Thai counterparts with some impressive capabilities. For instance, Thai SEALS regularly conduct exercises aimed at protecting oil and gas platforms in the Gulf of Thailand. This NSW relationship was graphically demonstrated during the tsunami response when USN and RTN SEALS rapidly deployed to

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Phuket to assist in the recovery efforts. The Prime Minister was photographed in a recovery boat manned by the SEALS. Despite their improved professionalism, the Thai SEALS are not well-supported by senior RTN officials. In your meetings with your counterparts, you may wish to discuss the importance of the SEALS and make mention of their capabilities.

REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY

15. (C) A key U.S. objective in the region is to improve Maritime Security. We are working closely with PACOM to encourage Thailand and others to support the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI). In November, during the U.S.-Thailand Strategic Dialogue, LTG Kemarat Kanchanawat, the Royal Thai Supreme Command (RTSC) Joint Operations Director, discussed a "Combined Maritime Patrol" architecture for the Strait of Malacca that would involve Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. In a January 24 meeting with the Ambassador, RTN CINC ADM Satirapan Keyanon indicated that the RTN was leery of this Combined Maritime Patrol architecture, suggesting that Kemarat was trying to commit the RTN budget to the proposal without proper authority. During your meetings with RTN officers, you may wish to probe for a clearer understanding of how the Thai Navy views its

responsibilities to safeguard waters in the region. On a related topic, RTN officials are skeptical of the Malaysian sponsored "Eyes in the Sky" program. Thailand does not plan to actively participate for at least a year due to not having enough aircraft to sustain long-term patrolling.

UTAPAO UPGRADES

16. (C) Utapao NAS has been designated by PACOM as the most important Cooperative Security Location (CSL) in the Asia Pacific Region. While we avoid using the term "CSL" with the Thai due to their sensitivities about bases, Utapao remains vital to our interests in the region. Thai and U.S. officials in-country concur that Utapao is due for significant safety upgrades in order to continue to meet our needs. Although Utapao is a RTN facility, PACAF is the executive agent exploring whether the United States can assist in providing safety upgrades there. Thai military officials still await the results of a PACAF assessment of Utapao which took place in September. Royal Thai Navy officials recently indicated to the Ambassador that they seek radar upgrades at Utapao in addition to fire safety and other improvements.

THE ROLE OF CHINA AND INDIA IN THE REGION

17. (C) Southeast Asia continues to feel the rising influence of China and India. While emphasizing the vital role of the U.S. in the region -- and Thailand's desire to intensify U.S. engagement -- Thai leaders also focus on developing stronger relations with the two regional powers. The Thai view both countries as sources of unlimited consumer demand and hope to conclude Free Trade Agreements with both nations. Given your close interest in those countries, it would be worthwhile for you to exchange views on the future roles of India and China.

COUNTERTERRORISM AND SOUTHERN THAILAND

18. (C) Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's biggest domestic challenge is the unsettled security situation in the far southern part of the country. Southern Thailand, in particular the southernmost Muslim majority provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, has experienced episodic violence since it was incorporated into the Siamese Kingdom in 1902. However, since January 2004, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the level of violence. Press reports indicate that over 1,000 persons have been killed either by militants or by security forces during this period. Local Muslim separatist militants have attacked symbols of Thai and Buddhist authority, civilians, and local citizens suspected of collaborating with the Government. There continue to be daily incidents of violence. In March 2005, Thaksin appointed a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) headed by highly respected former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun to look for alternative solutions to the long-running insurgency. The NRC is expected to present its findings in March 2006.

19. (C) The RTN does not play a role in addressing the situation in the South. Nonetheless, Thai officials may ask you for U.S. equipment and technology such as UAVs. We suggest you be non-committal. There are widely circulated rumors among ethnic Malay Muslims that the U.S. has fomented the violence in the South in order to justify a U.S. security presence there. This has made the RTG very sensitive about any visible U.S. assistance aimed at the South. You should be aware of these concerns when discussing offers of possible U.S. assistance.

USN SHIP ACCESS

10. (C) Port access for USN ships in Thailand is a high priority. Current exercise planning and ship visits, particularly to Gulf Of Thailand ports, are affected because USN ships are limited in their ability to enter Thai Navy ports with confidence because the navigation charts provided are outdated and inaccurate. We know the RTN has more accurate and current data but they have been unwilling to provide the information thus far. In his January meeting with the Ambassador, ADM Satirapan promised to explore sharing better charts with us. You may wish to follow up on this matter during your meetings.

HARRIERS

11. (C) The RTN, like the other services, does not have a long-range vision of what Thailand's maritime security needs are, what threats Thailand might need to counter, or what equipment it should procure. As a result, its inventory includes a wide variety of equipment of questionable utility. One example is its VSTOL Carrier, the Chakri Naruebet. Thailand procured the carrier from Spain and, at the same time, bought eight used AV-8 Harriers. These aircraft are no longer airworthy. For several years, we have been urging the Thai to use their carrier as a helicopter platform. A number of RTN officers agree and have supported more training for

helo ops from the Chakri Naruebet. However, another faction within the RTN continues to ask us for more Harriers. If you are asked for AV-8's, you may wish to underscore that we have no surplus Harriers due to their use elsewhere and urge the Thai to continue to develop their carrier as a helicopter platform.

NAVAL HAWK (MH-60S) HELICOPTER

¶12. (C) The RTN has expressed an interest in increasing the size of its helicopter force. One option is to purchase four of the new Sikorsky MH-60S Naval Hawk. With its design emphasis on multi-mission capabilities, most particularly logistics, SAR and light attack, coupled with the fact that it is marinized for shipboard operations, make this aircraft ideal for the roles and missions of the RTN. Although the RTN wants the MH-60S, it has been experiencing sticker shock and has had difficulty getting the funding required through the budgetary process. You may wish to ask your interlocutors whether the RTN is willing to push for the funding required to purchase four aircraft as planned.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR VISIT

¶13. (U) Have a safe trip , and I look forward to your visit.
BOYCE